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AUTHOR'S NOTE

[image]

I want to start this off by saying that this will be a dark book that deals with some heavy themes. Suicide, death, gore, cannibalism, murder, and even characters going crazy will be in this story. If you can't read that, I suggest turning around now.

I had plenty of fun writing this short story and I hope you'll enjoy reading it. Have an amazing time and enjoy yourself!

ALLEGIANCES

[image]

SHADOWCLAN
Leader —
Molestar: Sleek black tom with rounded ears and dark green eyes.

Deputy —
Owltuft: Fluffy gray-brown she-cat with blue eyes and a white underbelly.

Medicine Cats —
Hemlockfoot: White tom with silver tabby patches and blue eyes.
Apprentice — Rainpaw: Blue-gray tom with yellow eyes and a white chest, tail tip, and toes.

Warriors —
Ashclaw: Dark gray tabby tom with amber eyes.
Apprentice — Fennelpaw: Calico she-cat with green eyes and a long, bushy tail.

Bramblefoot: Tall brown she-cat with yellow eyes.

Buzzardstripe: Fluffy brown tom with jagged black stripes and green eyes.
Apprentice — Morningpaw: Creamy white she-cat with blue eyes and a white underbelly.

Crowshade: Solid black tom with amber eyes and torn ears.

Firedapple: Black tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes and small flecks of ginger fur.
Apprentice — Cedarpaw: Large ginger tabby tom with pale green eyes

and a white muzzle.

Leopardjump: Golden-brown tom with yellow eyes and brown spots.

Newtdash: Calico she-cat with blue eyes.

Petalheart: Fluffy gray she-cat with a white underbelly and green eyes.

Pinebranch: Tall, dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes and white toes.
Apprentice — Flintpaw: Fluffy black she-cat with green eyes and white paws.

Ratstrike: Small black tom with blue eyes and small ears.

Scorchmask: Creamy white she-cat with ginger tabby patches and dark orange eyes.

Smokebristle: Blue-gray tom with blue eyes and large paws.
Apprentice — Whiskerpaw: Silver tabby tom with long whiskers and a broken back leg.

Spidertail: Large pale brown she-cat with soft green eyes and a darker brown tail.

Queens —
Mistywillow: Small white she-cat with silver limbs and pale yellow eyes.
Kits: Finchkit (brown and white tom), Milkykit (white she-kit), and Lynxkit (small brown she-kit)

Elders —
Beetlespeck: Dark gray tom with dappled black tabby markings and green eyes.

Sagedusk: Silver tabby she-cat with odd eyes.

THUNDERCLAN
Leader —

Yellowstar: Pale ginger tabby she-cat with blue eyes and a white underbelly.

Deputy —
Mousefreckle: Gray tom with darker flecks and yellow eyes.

Medicine Cats —
Adderwish: Large ginger tabby tom with brown eyes and a white muzzle.

Beewing: Short, fluffy black she-cat with missing eyes.

RIVERCLAN
Leader —
Salmonstar: Fluffy gray tom with darker freckles and amber eyes.

Deputy —
Sandfeather: Creamy white tom with green eyes.

Medicine Cat —
Wavestorm: Fluffy blue-gray tom with silver paws and green eyes.

WINDCLAN
Leader —
Cottonstar: Tall white tom with a bushy tail and yellow eyes.

Deputy —
Darkbreeze: Black tom with a white underbelly and green eyes.

Medicine Cat —
Briardash: Tall brown tabby she-cat with torn ears and a paler tail tip.
Apprentice — Redpaw: Dark ginger tabby tom with yellow eyes and large ears.

Warriors —
Rowantail: Elderly ginger tom with a bushy tail and dark yellow eyes.

SKYCLAN
Leader —
Cardinalstar: Dilute tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes and large white paws.

Deputy —
Puddlestone: White tom with brown tabby patches and green eyes.

Medicine Cats —
Daisyfleck: White tom with blue eyes and small flecks of ginger on body.

Swiftsong: Brown she-cat with a darker face and amber eyes.

PROLOGUE

[image]

It was cold and windy out when the two ShadowClan cats arrived at the Moonpool. The older one, a silver-and-white tom with an icy gaze, looked behind him to make sure his apprentice was still there.

"I feel like each time we get here, it's always colder," commented the apprentice.

The older tom twitched his whiskers. "Alright, Rainpaw, enough chatter. Remember to keep quiet about how many of us have died. We can't let RiverClan know we are weak."

Rainpaw nodded and marched forward, his tail held high in the air. The tom couldn't help but feel pride towards his apprentice and how he had grown so much during his apprenticeship. He still had a little longer to go before he'd receive his medicine cat name, but the tom had a few ideas in mind. *Maybe Rainpelt for his fur, or Rainecho for how well he is with communication.*

The medicine cats from each Clan gathered around. An emergency meeting had been called, and desperate for news on the new disease, everyone had actually showed up. Even RiverClan, who seemed to be desperate for more territory and incredibly hostile during this time, had sent their medicine cat.

Adderwish, the ThunderClan tom who had called for this meeting, was perched on a stone near his own apprentice, Beewing. Beewing, who had previously been a warrior but lost her vision in a fight with a fox, seemed thin and frail when put near her mentor. She was almost as small as Rainpaw himself.

"As you all know, a lot of cats have been falling ill recently from this new illness," Adderwish began. "ThunderClan recently lost their

beloved deputy to it. We need to figure this out before everyone else starts to die."

The ShadowClan tom, Hemlockfoot, nodded in agreement. "My apprentice and I have come up with a name for it. We call it *bloodcough* since cats who catch it end up coughing up a lot of blood."

The RiverClan medicine cat, Wavestorm, narrowed his eyes. "How is a name important during a time like this, mousebrain? We came here to learn facts, not what your stupid apprentice names things!"

Rainpaw flinched at the harsh words of the tom. Hemlockfoot growled, flattening his ears as he stood in front of the apprentice. "Keep your mouth shut or I will drown you myself."

Wavestorm let out a chuckle. "Unlike your filthy friends, I can *swim*."

"Silence!" Beewing spat. "Bloodcough is fine as a name, it makes talking about it easier. But we do need to figure out treatments for it."

Briardash, the WindClan medicine cat, stood up. "Redpaw and I have been trying to treat the symptoms but it doesn't seem to help save the cat. We've tried borage for the chest and stomach pains but it didn't seem to help at all..."

Swiftsong of SkyClan nodded in agreement. "I tried using catmint to see if that would do anything but unfortunately it never worked as good as I had hoped."

"Does anyone have a list of all known symptoms?" Hemlockfoot asked.

Wavestorm twitched his whiskers in amusement. "Leave it to a smelly frog eater to need help during a time like this."

Adderwish shot a glare at the RiverClan tom. He seemed as sick of Wavestorm's attitude as Hemlockfoot.

"I believe there are different stages to bloodcough," Beewing

remarked. "Early on it seems the diseased just have basic problems such as runny noses, weak breathing, and overall lethargic behavior. Later on the end up eating our entire pile of fresh-kill and coughing up blood."

Redpaw, the newest medicine cat apprentice, looked as if he was ready to throw up because of the topic. Hemlockfoot felt pity for the young tom. It must suck being responsible for all the Clan at such a young age, especially with something this dangerous.

"A few of my Clanmates seemed a bit delusional before they died," Daisyfleck remarked. "As in hallucinating and bad paranoia. Willowvine's dying words were to not let the weasels get her... But there aren't even any weasels in our territory."

"It isn't my place to discuss how my Clanmates are doing during this," Wavestorm said bitterly. "But I do agree... They seemed a bit out of it before they died. But we did have an apprentice had a bad seizure after catching this illness though."

Redpaw let out a wail. "I don't want to watch my friends and family *just suffer and die*!" the young tom cried. "Bloodcough is going to kill all of us!"

As the apprentice collapsed and began to cry, Rainpaw seemed to begin getting upset as well. Despite having been an apprentice for a couple moons, he had never experienced something as awful as this. Hemlockfoot wrapped his tail around him and let out a sight, scooting closer to him.

"The sun will probably be coming up soon," Swiftsong meowed. "Perhaps we should head home."

Wavestorm nodded and stalked off without another word. Hemlockfoot watched him leave, holding back the urge to shred the tom's ears. RiverClan had recently declared war on ShadowClan after a small argument over prey. RiverClan had gone far enough to drown two warriors in the lake while the third cat watched in horror. When the cat, Spidertail, returned to camp that day, Hemlockfoot knew it would take a lot of counseling to help the poor she-cat's trauma.

Rainpaw looked up at his mentor, his eyes wide with fright. "Can we please return to camp? I'm worried about Morningpaw now..."

Hemlockfoot nodded and stood up. He looked back at Adderwish and the other medicine cats, thanking them for their time before heading out behind Rainpaw.

CHAPTER ONE

[image]

Morning sunlight trickled through the entrance of the medicine den. Hemlockfoot woke up, blinking away his sleepiness. Located nearby in the den was Rainpaw, who seemed to be sound asleep after the meeting last night.

"Wake up, Rainpaw," Hemlockfoot warned. "You can't spend all your days sleeping in like this."

Rainpaw grunted and rolled over, turning his back to Hemlockfoot. "We stayed up all night talking about a stupid disease... let me sleep in a little."

The older tom rolled his eyes. "There's a lot for you to learn. The sooner we get it done, the sooner you can get your name and I can retire."

Rainpaw didn't respond other than let out a quiet snore. Hemlockfoot sighed and sat down, watching the young tom. He didn't understand how anyone could sleep so heavily, especially at such a young age.

Hemlockfoot could feel his stomach gnawing away at him. It had been at least a day since he'd last eaten. The fear of starvation began to overwhelm him. He'd have to eat eventually or else he'd end up dead like the others. *Maybe the forest would have something more to offer me?* He thought to himself. *Probably a few mice or birds.*

Hemlockfoot left the den and greeted Crowshade with a good morning. Slipping out of camp, Hemlockfoot made his way to the twoleg place border. Surely prey would have to be there considering how much trash the twolegs left around.

The stale scent of a fox clung to the icy air. Normally, Hemlockfoot

would have been worried about this. But something about the peaceful morning light seemed to push away those fears. The tom looked up at the sky, noticing a few dark clouds in the distance.

"I'm so sick of the snow," he grumbled to himself. "I rather eat fish than freeze like this."

Ahead of him, Hemlockfoot could make out the shape of a frail looking rabbit. He crept forward slowly, hoping his lighter colored pelt would help aid in camouflaging him.

Just as he began to get closer though, a loud and cracky yowl split the air. A ginger cat fell out from the bushes near the rabbit, causing it to dart off into its tunnel.

"Help me..." coughed the cat. "Please..."

Hemlockfoot flicked his tail, aggravated to have lost such a valuable piece of prey. He felt unbelievably hungry, especially after walking so far from camp just to lose a rabbit.

The medicine cat sat down and licked his lips. Was this some sick rogue? Maybe a RiverClan trick? The tom seemed extremely frail though, so maybe it wasn't either of those.

"Hello?" Hemlockfoot asked. "Who are you?"

The cat didn't seem to notice him. Perhaps the wind was too loud, or he was deaf and confused. Regardless, being ignored like this sent the medicine cat's blood boiling. He narrowed his eyes. Whoever this cat was, he wasn't going to get out of this without getting a good scolding.

CHAPTER TWO

[image]

Hemlockfoot watched from a distance as the tom stumbled around in the snow. The wind had begun to pick up, carrying his scent towards the medicine cat. *WindClan*. But... how? How did an old cat manage to get through RiverClan territory and into the pine forests of ShadowClan?

The medicine cat made his way towards the tom slowly. He was frail and thin, with a sleek ginger tabby pelt and dark yellow eyes. Hemlockfoot had never seen such a pitiful looking cat before, especially one this thin and elderly looking.

"What's wrong?" Hemlockfoot asked as he approached.

The old tom looked at him, fear flashing in his eyes. "Everything hurts... I feel weak... WindClan couldn't help me..." he rasped.

The ShadowClan tom got closer and saw the blood dripping from his jaws. Could an elderly tom have done something as bad as murder? Maybe it was prey? Or maybe...

"My name is Rowantail... I need help..." the tom began again. "Please... Please just help me..."

Hemlockfoot felt a wave of hunger crash over him. It wasn't just hunger though. He knew, deep down, that this cat wouldn't surge a functional purpose anymore at this age. He knew that he would die soon enough. All he needed was a little push.

"Follow me, I can solve your pain," the medicine cat said calmly. "Just be quick. I can't let my clanmates see you."

Large snowflakes began to fall through the branches as they arrived at Hemlockfoot's secret den. It was a small hollow log,

which was usually covered in vibrant moss when the weather was warm. Hemlockfoot considered it his own little hideout where he could go to escape the stress of his duty. But now, it would serve as a place to deal with the pitiful cat.

Rowantail collapsed in the den, his breathing shallow and raspy. He let out a weak cough, blood coming out as well. Hemlockfoot sunk his claws into the snow below him, trying to summon all his strength. It was now or never.

Using an old technique passed down from generation to generation of ShadowClan medicine cats, Hemlockfoot hooked his claws into the back of the old tom's neck, shoving them in deeply and quickly. The old tom hardly had time to scream before he had already been stunned and killed.

The silver-and-white tom hovered over his body, eying him down. He flipped him over, pressing his head against Rowantail's chest in search of a pulse. Nothing.

"I'm finally giving you a purpose," Hemlockfoot told him. "You were bound to die anyways... But at least now your friends and family don't have to watch it. At least now you're serving one last purpose."

Hemlockfoot had no idea what had overcome him to do what he did. It was like a switch. One moment he had been filled with anxiety and dread, but now he felt powerful and relaxed. Before he knew it, he had killed an innocent cat.

The taste was... not as bad as he had expected. Perhaps it was the hunger that he had been experiencing. Or maybe cat was just naturally delicious. Either way, Hemlockfoot found himself enjoying his meal.

He looked down at the body, slowly realizing what he had done. A sick feeling began to rise in his stomach.

Stay calm, Hemlockfoot. He was trespassing. He was old and weak. He served his purpose. StarClan sent him here just to complete one final task.

"I need to hide you," he said, beginning to worry. "I'm so sorry."

Grabbing the tom's injured scruff, he began to drag him through the snow. The blizzard, which had gotten worse during his feeding, would hopefully cover the trail of blood that followed the two cats. *Hopefully*.

Luck seemed to be in Hemlockfoot's favor though, because when he looked up, the trail was covered rather well. Perhaps he'd have to injure himself just to be safe though. No harm in being extra careful.

• • • •

The medicine cat stumbled into camp, a large gash on his chest bleeding profusely. He had decided his best alibi would be getting attacked by kittypets after venturing a little past the border for some herbs.

"What happened?" asked Newtdash, rushing up to him. "Did RiverClan do this?"

No, I did this. I killed an innocent cat and then tore my own claws through my flesh. Something must be wrong with me... Maybe I have bloodcough.

The sounds of more voices snapped Hemlockfoot from his thoughts. "I went a little past the Twolegplace border... There were extremely rude toms lounging around where I was... I didn't mean to cause trouble..."

Rainpaw rushed over, a bundle of herbs in his jaws. Hemlockfoot smiled at him, pride shining in his eyes. He did a good job training his apprentice. Even though Hemlockfoot knew his wounds wouldn't kill him, he was glad that Rainpaw would be helping him out. Maybe one day he'd actually save a life.

CHAPTER THREE

[image]

Only three days had passed since Hemlockfoot had murdered and eaten the elderly tom. And during those three days, he had begun getting extremely stressed. He felt an empty feeling on his stomach, and at times during the day when he'd remember what he did, he felt as if he was choking. It only seemed to get worse as the days went on.

"You're up early," Hemlockfoot remarked as he noticed Rainpaw.

The apprentice was watching him from a distance, his eyes almost glowing in the darkness of the den. "I feel like something is going on that you're not telling me about."

The medicine cat froze. "Nothing more than anxiety."

Rainpaw frowned. "Is it that bad? I thought you said you were getting better..."

He let out a forced laugh. "You can't just cure anxiety, Rainpaw. Sure, you can find ways to manage it, but it's always going to be there."

"Still... I thought you said you were managing it just fine."

"I was but then this stupid bloodcough showed up and has me worrying about everyone. Nobody seems to actually care that much except the medicine cats," Hemlockfoot huffed.

Rainpaw nodded. "It's because ShadowClan hasn't seen the worst of it yet. I keep dreaming about it but never any cures for it. I sometimes wonder if StarClan *wants* us to all die off."

Hemlockfoot hadn't thought of it that way. But why would StarClan be that evil? He let out a heavy sigh and curled his tail around his

paws, trying to clear the thought from his mind.

"If you're going to be that nervous about our ancestors, maybe you shouldn't be a medicine cat. You should always have faith in StarClan," the older tom finally said. "After all, we've come this far, so not believing in them now wouldn't do us any good."

The apprentice got up from his nest and made his way over to the older medicine cat. "How are your injuries? And do you think those kittypets will cause trouble for ShadowClan?"

They won't cause problems because they don't exist. Unless my imagination comes to life, then you're all safe for now, Hemlockfoot thought.

"I doubt they'll come into the territory. Like I said, I went past the border when I got a whiff of something nice. They just happened to see me and got a bit territorial. I can't really blame them."

The blue-gray tom narrowed his eyes. Was he catching on to Hemlockfoot? The older tom kept his gaze locked with his apprentice, hoping there wouldn't be more questions. Surely his apprentice wouldn't ever assume something like murder.

"You smell funny."

Hemlockfoot's pelt felt like it was on fire. What did Rainpaw just say? "Excuse me?"

Rainpaw laughed and walked out of the den, his tail swishing behind him. "You still smell like mud and moss and the RiverClan border. Go wash off in the lake or something."

The tom got up and sniffed his sides. He did smell awful. *Is this bloodcough?* he thought to himself. *We haven't had any cases but maybe it smells like this. What if I am sick? Could you even catch something like this from eating someone else?*

Silently and quickly, he left the den. He could see Rainpaw chatting away with Morningpaw and Sagedusk. If he did die from this disease, at least Rainpaw would be able to look after everyone. His naming ceremony would be coming up soon, and that would mean

Hemlockfoot could pass on peacefully. Despite his feelings of peace and joy, the fear of dying of starvation or even disease began to creep into the back of his mind.

No, the medicine cat thought, *I will not let myself die this way. I refuse to.*

CHAPTER FOUR

[image]

Blood was everywhere. It was leaking from his mouth, his nose, and his eyes. It was everywhere. Hemlockfoot looked down, noticing the limp and bloody corpse of the WindClan tom known as Rowantail. Oh, poor Rowantail. His untimely fate was destined to haunt Hemlockfoot forever. The medicine cat licked his lips, admiring the now rotten body as he flexed his claws into the ground. A sudden cough erupted from his throat, blood gurgling out with it as he collapsed and began to shake. The voices, they were back...

"Hemlockfoot! Wake up! We have to talk to you!" Molestar demanded, jabbing his paws into Hemlockfoot's side.

The medicine cat jumped up, gasping for air. Slowly, he began to realize everything was okay. He was alive, he was healthy, and he was not currently standing over a cat that he had just eaten.

"What do you want?" the tom grumbled as he eyed the leader.

"I've been worried about you. Your pelt is a mess and I've never seen someone so agitated. Is everything alright?"

"Nothing is wrong," Hemlockfoot snapped. "I just had a nightmare. If something was wrong then I'd tell you."

Molestar frowned. The black tom seemed unusually large compared to the medicine cat. Hemlockfoot could feel his first rising as he began to crouch down in a defensive state. Why did everyone seem to be assuming he was a killer?

I'm not a killer. They don't know what I did. All I did was save myself by using a cat that would die soon anyways. That isn't that bad...

"Well? Do you need herbs or something?" Hemlockfoot asked

him coldly.

The black tom twitched his whiskers. "What is wrong with you? I've never seen you so upset. Are you sick?"

Sick? Am I sick? I can't be sick. But maybe I am. Maybe Rowantail gave me bloodcough. Oh StarClan, I'm going to die! I'm going to have seizures and paranoia and die a horrible death!

"I'm not upset... just mildly stressed."

Rainpaw stepped up behind the leader, looking at his mentor. "You don't have to be afraid of us. I know you're stressed but you are acting so unusual. Please, just tell us what's wrong!"

Hemlockfoot looked away from his apprentice. All he could feel was embarrassed about his feelings and disgust for what he'd done. How could he even go about telling his friends about his actions? Surely they'd hate him, or worse, kill him in retaliation. Either way, the results didn't seem good.

"Bloodcough is a scary disease and there's nothing to it. I'm just worried we're all going to get it and die horrible deaths," he confessed.

Molestar sat down and neatly wrapped his tail around his paws. "Hemlockfoot, I've never seen you this stressed. Not when Whiskerpaw had a branch fall on him, not when your own father got nearly killed by a badger, and certainly not when we've had bad fits of greencough go through camp. Surely there's more to it?"

Hemlockfoot exhaled and inhaled heavily. Each one of those had stressed him out to the point where he had been physically sick. How could anyone have the audacity to assume he was upset about something else?

I'm innocent in their eyes. They're never going to figure out what I did. Just play stupid and dodge it.

... But what if they did know? What if they had seen me? What if they were plotting to kill me right now over this? What if Molestar knew Rainpaw was ready enough and figured now is the best time to kill me?

"I need to go cool off. It's just stress and nightmares, stop being so worried," he scolded warmly before stalking off as quickly as he could.

The tom could feel their gazes burning into him as he made for the camp's exit. Anxiety seemed to be stabbing him all over, like a hawk stabbing its recent catch. Shakily, he made his way through the pine trees and to his secret hideout. Nobody needed to know about anything.

CHAPTER FIVE

[image]

During his hunt, a pile of snow had fallen off a branch, nearly taking out Hemlockfoot. Typically he would be humored by this, but the medicine cat now believed this was StarClan's way of taking him out for what he had done. Lucky for him, a squirrel has fallen down with the snow. It was an easy enough catch and made the tom happy to be returning to camp and looking as if he had been useful.

But now, as he walked into camp, he felt a sense of dread creep up his spine. Molestar was sitting in his den, with Rainpaw slowly leaving it. Had they been discussing him? He dropped his squirrel off at the fresh-kill pile.

"WindClan stopped by," Rainpaw told the tom as he walked closer. "One of their senior warriors is missing."

"Are they still here?"

Rainpaw nodded. "Molestar is talking to them right now about it by himself. Apparently a cat named Rowantail was showing signs of bloodcough and went missing a few days ago. They thought he would've come back by now and have searched both the underground tunnels and their territory and the barn."

Hemlockfoot could feel his heart begin to race. It felt like it would burst from his chest. *Maybe if I am lucky, a heart attack will kill me before anyone figures out what happened to Rowantail*.

"Not sure why they'd come here," the tom told his apprentice. "We're on the other side of the lake."

Rainpaw shrugged. "I think they're just going around and asking about it. Darkbreeze is their new deputy and I think they may have

been related to Rowantail."

Hemlockfoot nodded. Cottonstar wasn't the type of cat to exactly care if a single warrior went missing, but now that there was a younger and more helpful deputy, changes probably would start to take place. He remembered seeing Darkbreeze, who was then Darkpaw, long ago at a gathering when he had just become a medicine cat.

"I'm glad someone is finally taking charge of the Clan. WindClan needs to convince that senile tom to step down and let Darkbreeze take over," Hemlockfoot commented bitterly. "I'm going to go see what they're talking about."

Rainpaw stayed behind as the older tom made his way over to Molestar's den. Inside sat the elderly white leader, Cottonstar, along with Darkbreeze and Briardash.

"Greetings, Hemlocktail," Cottonstar smiled as he saw the tom.

"It's Hemlockfoot," Briardash reminded him.

"Hemlockfoot," Cottonstar laughed.

Hemlockfoot sat down beside his leader. He wrapped his tail around his paws, trying his best to remain calm. "Rainpaw told me this was about a missing cat?"

Darkbreeze nodded. "My father went missing a couple days ago. We assumed he was just going off to hunt, but then Briardash informed us he had been coughing up blood and showing other signs of greencough."

Briardash rolled her eyes. "It is *bloodcough*! They're two completely different things!"

Darkbreeze twitched his whiskers and ignored the she-cat's remark. "Anyways. Have you seen a ginger tom roaming around by any chance? Thin and frail with yellow eyes?"

Hemlockfoot shook his head. "No, but while I was looking for herbs I was attacked by the kittypets just a little past out border. If

he managed to stumble all this way, he could have gone to them."

Darkbreeze's pelt bristled with alarm. "Are you positive? Where?"

Please don't let them go look and find some soft kittypets. Please don't let them go look for him at all.

Molestar nodded. "Hemlockfoot would have to show you. But if he had bloodcough, maybe he is dead by now."

Briardash looked away. "I tried telling them but they wouldn't listen. Typically it kills quickly and by now a cat that coughed up blood would be dead."

Darkbreeze stood up and lashed his tail. "Shut up! Rowantail could still be alive!"

Briardash narrowed her eyes. "Don't you *ever* take that tone with *me*. I am your *medicine cat* and you are to *respect me*. I am your *advisor*!"

Hemlockfoot felt awkward watching this argument. He looked away, trying to find something else to focus on while the two cats argued. *How can Darkbreeze be a good leader if he can't trust his medicine cat's words?*

... Is that how Molestar feels with me? Is he going to make me retire because he thinks I am lying? If he knows I am lying? The thoughts raced around his mind. Surely Molestar was smart enough to not do that to his most trusted medicine cat... right?

"I think it is best we be on our way," Cottonstar told the cats. "We still need to talk to SkyClan and ThunderClan about this."

Molestar stood up and let the elderly leader walk by. Darkbreeze and Briardash followed behind, neither looking at each other.

"Promise me you'll always try your best to get along with any leaders and deputies that come after me and Owltuft," Molestar told him quietly.

Hemlockfoot let out a humored purr. "I don't think you have anything to worry about. Rainpaw and I know how to keep everyone in check around here."

Seconds after leaving Molestar's den, the medicine cat felt a wave of anxiety hit him like a monster. *If Rowantail really was exposed to bloodcough, what does that mean for me? Darkbreeze must be feeling awful too... But I was in the right, I have to be. I need to survive. I can't die yet. Rowantail was screwed and I just let him serve a final purpose. Surely that can't be that bad?*

CHAPTER SIX

[image]

All day and all night, Hemlockfoot couldn't shake off the feeling he was being watched. He also kept waking up hungry but forced himself to sleep again, knowing that his clanmates needed any stale food more than him. By now, they should have been rising soon, but nobody seemed to be awake.

The medicine cat rested his icy gaze on Rainpaw. The young tom was curled up in a tight ball, his nose buried into his bushy tail. Every now and then, the young cat's ear would twitch.

I wonder what he is dreaming about, Hemlockfoot thought. *Perhaps he's hunting, or maybe he's climbing trees. Maybe he's even getting news from StarClan. Some good news would be incredibly nice.*

Silently, he got up and stretched. A quiet yawn escaped his mouth as he flexed his claws into the ground. He poked his head outside the den, noticing how much warmer it had begun to feel. Was leaf-bare finally over? Would some warm weather and prey finally be coming back? Even though the ground was still coated with snow and the sun hadn't risen yet, the sky seemed much clearer than it ever had before.

"Morning, Hemlockfoot," remarked Scorchmask. The she-cat had been the one in charge of watching the camp during the night in case RiverClan attacked.

"You can probably go get some rest now," the medicine cat told her. "The sun should be coming up soon."

Scorchmask came over and sat down beside him. "I enjoy the night. It's so peaceful compared to daytime. Have you ever really looked closely at the stars?"

Hemlockfoot shook his head. He had in the past, but recently he didn't want to think too hard about StarClan or purposely try to find them. They'd be so disappointed in him, and he would rather they come to him now.

"I assumed you'd like doing that since you're a medicine cat," the she-cat said.

"Sometimes I like to. But I'm a little worried that StarClan might be upset with me."

The tabby patched she-cat eyed him. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Hemlockfoot sighed. "I'm just worried they're mad at us and cursed us with bloodcough."

Scorchmask nodded. "That sounds reasonable. Or maybe they aren't in control of this but know we can get through it. You used to always be so spiritual, what happened?"

"I still am... I just need to think about other stuff for ones. I'm so stressed and feel so sick."

"Do you have bloodcough?"

"At this point I don't know or care. I'm hungry though so I'm just going to grab some prey. You're welcome to join me if you'd like," Hemlockfoot said, steering away the conversation.

The she-cat didn't seem to notice his change of topic and smiled. "That'd be nice. Nice catch with the squirrel yesterday, the elders seemed to really appreciate it."

Hemlockfoot grabbed a small and scrawny mouse of the pile. It looked as if it would hardly fill his empty stomach. He laid down and began to eat, savoring each bite. Visions of Rowantail seemed to fog his mind the more he nibbled on the mouse though.

Will anything ever make you content again? Rowantail sure filled you up. And he tasted wonderful. You know you won't be getting any good food again for a while...

"I'm sure glad leaf-bare is almost over," Scorchmask purred as she settled beside him.

"Same. I'm *starving*," Hemlockfoot remarked.

The she-cat nodded. "It's been a while since I've seen anything good. All this prey is thinner than a WindClan elder!"

Hemlockfoot froze after her words. Rowantail had been incredibly thin, yet he'd been such a good meal. *Why did he taste so good?* he thought.

"I think I'm going to be going back to sleep. Maybe you should get some rest as well," he told her.

Scorchmask sighed. "Maybe. Sleep well, Hemlockfoot."

CHAPTER SEVEN

[image]

"*Food. I need food. I must eat. I can't starve. I can't let myself get weak. I cannot die. Not yet," were Hemlockfoot's words as he tore into the shadowy cat that was laying on the ground. It tasted amazing. It was so nice to finally eat again.*

"Hemlockfoot!"

Had he been caught? What was happening?

"Hemlockfoot!"

"Hemlockfoot please! Get up!"

The tom rolled over to see his apprentice standing over him. His fur was bristling and his eyes were wide with fear. Hemlockfoot had never seen him look so distraught.

"What's happening?" he asked, half asleep. "Is WindClan here?"

"Morningpaw is coughing and I think she's going to have a seizure! What do I do? I can't let her die! She's so young and-"

Hemlockfoot shot up from his nest before the apprentice could finish. He crashed into the apprentices den, alarm ringing through him. There was no way to help this cat. All he could try to do was help the symptoms.

Pictured in front of him was a scene he could have never expected. Morningpaw lay on the ground, blood pooling around her head as she twitched violently on the ground. Her eyes were rolled

into the back of her head, and her limbs flailed about. Even as she convulsed, blood seemed to keep leaking from her mouth.

"Don't just stand there!" Smokebristle, her father, cried.

Scorchmask, her mother, was standing over her, trying to talk to her. "Morningpaw! Please stop! This isn't funny! Please talk to me! You're going to be okay..."

Hemlockfoot didn't know what to do. He was almost afraid he would get hurt if he attempted to help her during the seizure.

"Smokebristle, please go keep Rainpaw out of the den... I don't want him to see her like this. Scorchmask, please try to calm down, we can't do anything for her until she's done with this," the tom told the horrified parents.

Smokebristle stood for a moment, looking back at his daughter. Grief seemed to hang in his eyes as he saw his kit suddenly stop moving. "Is she..." he trailed off.

Scorchmask looked down at her kit, watching as the life slowly began to fade from her already sickly looking eyes. The she-cat, who was usually so calm, collapsed over Morningpaw, burying her face into her pelt and wailing. It was painful to watch.

"You didn't even do anything..." Rainpaw mumbled as he stood in the den's entrance.

Hemlockfoot turned around, sadness in his gaze. "There isn't anything that could have been done. She was too far gone and there isn't a cure."

Rainpaw rushed over his to family and sat down beside his sister. The other apprentices, who had crouched down off to the side, seemed hesitant to approach the grieving family and body. Flintpaw, who seemed to be close with the deceased she-cat, slowly approached and sat down beside Rainpaw.

"We need to get her out of here as soon as we can... We can't risk spreading bloodcough to the others," Hemlockfoot warned wearily.

Stormbristle shot him a glare. "Just go away. Let my family grieve."

• • • •

The body had been placed in the middle of camp for ShadowClan to see. Once Stormbristle had been able to drag Scorchmask away from her kit, Hemlockfoot got to work with Rainpaw and the elders to move the body and prepare it for the vigil. As much as Hemlockfoot had wanted the body removed from camp immediately, he knew that a vigil would be much better for her.

Molestar was speaking with Stormbristle now. Hemlockfoot could hear them discussing her warrior name. She would have been receiving it soon. *She had so much ahead of her. She could have been the next leader. She could have become involved in a prophecy or had a family.*

"Do we have any rosemary left?" asked Sagedusk.

Rainpaw shook his head. "It's probably all rotted away. Pansies or primroses may still be blooming somewhere though."

Morningpaw's body was stiff and cold at this point. Her eyes were now peacefully shut, her pelt smoothed out, and the blood on her face was washed off with snow and damp moss. She looked like she was just resting. But Hemlockfoot knew she wasn't, and that wherever she was now, she was likely watching them prepare her. Would she be upset about not having rosemary? Was she scared by this? Was she grieving too? This had looked to be such a gorgeous day, yet here the tom was, preparing a young cat to be buried deep underground where she'd eventually rot away and be forgotten about.

"I'm sure she'd love pansies, and they'll stand out nicely from her pelt. I always thought we had some growing outside around camp somewhere. Just make sure to grab them with your paws and carry them in a leaf wrap. We don't need anyone getting poisoned," Hemlockfoot told the elders.

Sagedusk nodded and got up from where she sat. "Rainpaw,

would you like to come with us? I haven't left camp in ages and you look like you could use a break from this."

The apprentice looked at the elder. He got up and slowly began his way out of camp. Sagedusk and Beetlespeck followed behind him.

Hemlockfoot looked down at Morningpaw's corpse. He let out a heavy sigh. "I'm so sorry, Morningpaw. You were destined for so much more than this."

Aren't you rather... hungry?

The medicine cat froze at the thought. No. He could never... That would be wrong. That would be horrible. It would be *despicable.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

[image]

The sun had already begun to set by the time Rainpaw and the elders returned. Beetlespeck carried a branch of pine needles, while the other two carried bundles of pansies. While they'd been gone, he had heard Stormbristle trying to calm down Scorchmask, who was still sobbing in the apprentices den.

"If you want to go help with Scorchmask, you can leave the rest to me," Hemlockfoot told Rainpaw.

The tom shook his head. "I need to get used to losing everyone I care about. This is just the first of many deaths I will face."

Hemlockfoot nodded. "If you need to leave at any point, you can. I won't hold it against you."

Rainpaw nodded. Slowly, his gaze drifted from his mentor to his sister. "Why didn't you try to do anything?"

"She was already too gone. She would've have survived much longer either. I rather she stop suffering earlier."

The blue-gray tom nodded once more. Solemnly, he left and went to join his father and mother. Cats have begun to gather around, and while Scorchmask was still crying, she seemed to have calmed down a little more. She would likely need chamomile or goatweed later depending on what was available.

Molestar stepped out from his den, his fur groomed nicely and posture held properly. This was not his first vigil, and likely not his last. Over the course of his leadership, Molestar had made vigils

more ceremonial and peaceful than they had been in the past.

"I would like everyone to gather around. The sun has begun to set, and Morningpaw along with our other deceased clanmates will be watching over us now," Molestar announced.

Owltuft padded over beside her leader. The deputy was groomed equally well. Although her eyes seemed to be filled with grief, her posture did not change at all from the usual prideful stance she held.

"I, Molestar, call upon StarClan to watch over this young she-cat while she is with them. I would call her an apprentice, but as we all knew, she would have been a warrior soon. She has worked hard to serve ShadowClan and has trained hard to understand your noble code, so I ask to give her a warrior name in return. From this point onward, Morningpaw shall be known as Morningdaisy for her kindness, innocence, and loving nature. May StarClan accept her and treat her with absolute kindness."

"Morningdaisy!" called out Rainpaw, grief seeming to hover over the words.

"Morningdaisy!"

"Morningdaisy!"

Hemlockfoot joined in the cheers, thankful to see Scorchmask and Stormbristle had joined in. As the cheers died down, Flintpaw stood up from her spot and came up beside the leader.

"Morningdaisy was my best friend. She was the kindest cat I have ever met. She always put everyone else before her own needs. During this entire leaf-bare, I had hardly seen her eat because she wanted the elders to have something. I'm going to miss her, but I always know she'll be there to watch... to watch..." The apprentice's voice began to trail off, turning into a sob. "... To watch over us."

Buzzardstripe, who had been Morningdaisy's mentor, came up beside Molestar as Flintpaw walked away. "Morningdaisy was my first apprentice. She taught me how it feels to pass on my

knowledge and how fun it is to live a little. She was always striving to do her best, and no matter how much trouble she caused, she never complained about pulling ticks off the elders. I'm so proud of her, and I hope she knows that."

As Buzzardstripe walked away, Rainpaw came up to stand beside his leader. The tom looked down at his sister, his breathing seeming to come out more ragged. "Morningdaisy and I had always joked about who would get their name first. I always knew she would beat me, but I never expected it to be like this. I love her so much, and talking about her now hurts so much. I am thankful that I can speak with StarClan though. I know she'll be waiting for me next time I go to the Moonpool. I can't wait to see her healthy and happy again. Bloodcough is dangerous, and although we haven't really dealt with it until now, I am thankful she didn't suffer for long like some cats have. She deserves peace and happiness... Morningdaisy, if you're listening to me right now, I want to let you know that I will never let your kindness die. You may have passed on, but I will try my best to continue where you left off and treat everyone around me as kindly as I can."

As the vigil slowly came to an end, Hemlockfoot could feel himself getting more worried. Not just for the grieving cats, but for himself as well. He knew how and why Morningdaisy had died and yet he still wanted to eat her earlier. Maybe he still did.

The tom nosed his way through the few remaining cats. He'd be moving her body now. Typically it was done as the sun began to rise, but the medicine cat didn't want to risk anyone getting sick. He was probably too late though considering they had even held a vigil for the new warrior.

"I'll be taking her now," he said, slipping past Flintpaw and Stormbristle.

Scorchmask threw herself down on Morningdaisy's her pelt bristling and eyes filled with hatred and grief. "Stay away! You're not taking her from me!" she cried.

Hemlockfoot backed away, slightly frightened by the she-cat. "Scorchmask... Please..."

Stormbristle came up beside his mate and gripped her scruff, tugging her away from the body. Scorchmask writhed around, hissing and spitting in frustration. "Stay away from her! You can't take her from me! I can't lose her! Stay away from my kit!"

Stormbristle let go of her and held her close with his paws. The mother pressed her face into his thick fur, crying heavily, demanding him to not let Hemlockfoot bury her kid.

Hemlockfoot gripped Morningdaisy by her scruff and began to gently pull her from the camp. He didn't dare look up as he heard Scorchmask begin screaming once more, demanding he not bury her kit. Demanding he not put her into the filthy ground to rot away. The tom had other plans for Morningdaisy though, and he knew Scorchmask would rather her kit rot away in the filthy ground than what he planned to do with her.

CHAPTER NINE

[image]

Hemlockfoot slipped out of camp before the sun had even risen, hoping nobody would even noticed his absence. Despite the darkness around him, he felt it would be another beautiful day. An even more wonderful thought was his upcoming meal.

The tom had not lied to his Clan when he told them he would be burying her far away from the camp to prevent illness. However, he was not going to bury her until he'd eaten. His hunger had become unreasonable the past few days, and as disgusted as he was with himself, he found it incredibly creative to use the dead like this to his own advantage.

A body was merely a vessel that the soul possessed, so what actual use was it once the soul has moved from the realm of the living to the dead? Why waste something so useful, especially during a crisis like this? Hemlockfoot really didn't seem to understand the issue with any of this, but he knew ShadowClan would never approve.

As he arrived at his small hollowed out log, he could see the spot he had buried Morningdaisy. Buried was a strong word though, as he had merely just covered her with snow and placed rocks atop the pile.

Dig! Dig! Dig faster! Must eat! Hemlockfoot thought to himself. *I can't go another day without a good meal!*

When enough of her body had been exposed, the medicine cat immediately began eating. He didn't care if he made a mess. He didn't care if he looked like a lunatic. All he felt was safe, stable, and in the moment. He felt he finally had some control over the world around him, even if it was just a little bit.

The sounds of breaking through her fur and into her flesh filled his head with joy. It was cold, and somewhat stale, but tasted wonderful nonetheless. After what felt like moons of hunger, he was finally satisfied. He wouldn't starve to death the way he had feared he would.

As quickly as he had eaten Morningdaisy, Hemlockfoot began thinking of ways and places to hide her. So far Scorchmask showed no interest in looking for her kit to dig up, but that was still a possibility and thing he should take into consideration. Knowing this, perhaps it would be better to leave her buried at the RiverClan border or thrown into the icy lake where she'd never be seen again.

"Where should you go?" he asked Morningdaisy, almost expecting her to answer him.

Take me to the Twolegplace border, Hemlockfoot imagined her saying. *Nobody can get to me there!*

"You're right," the medicine cat decided. "I should take you there."

• • • •

The walk through the dense pine forest was long and tiring. The sun had just barley risen above the horizon when Hemlockfoot was finished. He was lucky that Morningdaisy hadn't bled as much as he expected, otherwise it would have been more difficult to hide it. For now though, he had to come up with a lie to cover for himself.

Yesterday night I buried the body far from camp to avoid any diseases spreading. Unfortunately I stubbed my paw on a rock which caused some bleeding. No... that doesn't sound very convincing. Maybe some blood came back up. Yeah, that might be it. After all, the body needs to get rid of fluids, but nobody else knows that. Surely Rainpaw wouldn't since I never taught him anything like that. It is a good thing I didn't.

The tom found himself digging without much thought. The ground was cold and muddy from all the snow on top of it, but luckily not frozen. New-leaf would likely arrive soon, meaning he wouldn't need to keep this up for much longer.

I'm horrible for what I've done... Why don't I feel bad though? I feel sick but at the same time I feel so alive and powerful and creative. What is this?

He rolled the mangled corpse into the shallow grave. Glancing down at her one last time, he felt a sense of dread come over him.

"Nobody needs to know," he told the body as he began moving the mud and snow back over it.

Morningdaisy never replied. She couldn't. All she did was stare at him blankly, her now foggy and sickly eyes rolled into the back of her head. If she had been alive, perhaps she would understand. Sometimes the medicine cat wished she would have become his apprentice. She was very understanding and considerate of others, along with being responsible and honest. It wasn't that he didn't like Rainpaw... Rainpaw was just a tad difficult at times.

As soon as he finished, he rushed off on his way home, going the way he came hoping to cover up the dead cat's scent and freshen up his own. The less suspicious, the better.

"Where are you going?" asked a familiar voice.

Hemlockfoot stopped dead in his tracks. He turned around, waiting to see the familiar face of Morningdaisy. That had been her voice after all, right? Maybe she was coming to forgive him or give him advice. Except nobody stood there.

He turned around and almost walked face first into the bright and starry figure of the deceased she-cat.

"Wh-what do you want?" Hemlockfoot stuttered, his pelt beginning to bristle.

Morningdaisy circled around him, her pelt fading in and out of the world around him. "Why did you do what you did?"

Hemlockfoot's only answer for the StarClan warrior was a sharp wail. He took off, rushing through the ferns and brambles and shrubs. He didn't bother to see were Morningdaisy was at now. He just needed to get away and collect himself.

The medicine cat's paws hit something cold, and as soon as he realized it, the ice below him shattered. How did he not notice how open the world now was? And how did he not hear the voices of the patrol that had been calling him?

The last thing he said before he felt himself hit the icy water was a silent, "Help me."

CHAPTER TEN

[image]

Hemlockfoot could not see not hear anything. All he felt was the icy grip of the lake around every part of him. Normally, a cat would at least try to fight the water and stay afloat, but Hemlockfoot had no desire to do so. Perhaps the world would be better off without cats like him that murdered and ate others.

The tom felt something sharp grip his scruff. Perhaps it was hypothermia setting it. Or maybe it was an underwater monster. Or, if he was lucky, perhaps it was someone saving him.

Luck seemed to be in his favor. He didn't know who his savior was, nor did he have any intentions of helping them save him. He didn't feel the need to do anything in this situation.

The tom felt himself hit the ground seconds after reaching land with his savior. He rolled over, his eyes weak and water clinging to his pet.

"Morningdaisy...?" he asked weakly, looking up at the glowing she-cat.

The StarClan warrior didn't have any expression in her voice or on her face. "You need to stop what you're doing."

Hemlockfoot coughed. "Am I sick?"

Morningdaisy didn't answer him. Instead, her already fuzzy outline had begun to fade away. What replaced her was the shaking figure of Firedapple, who seemed to be frantic and cold. Hemlockfoot assumed she had been the one to save him. Beside her was Crowshade, who didn't seem pleased at all about the situation.

"Hemlockfoot? Are you alright?" Firedapple asked.

"Where is Morningdaisy?" Hemlockfoot asked weakly.

"Let's get him to Rainpaw," Crowshade grumbled. "Can't believe our own medicine cat is stupid enough to go running into the lake. You're lucky we were here to rescue you, otherwise you'd be feeding all those fish!"

Hemlockfoot stood up, his legs wobbling below him. He was lucky that Firedapple had gotten him before he inhaled any of the water. Otherwise he probably would be joining StarClan, or the Dark Forest, very soon.

"Get me home..."

"Cedarpaw, go warn Rainpaw that his mentor fell into the lake and will likely need medical assistance," Crowshade told the nearby apprentice.

Cedarpaw nodded before rushing off. He had grown into one of the Clan's quickest runners, and despite his bitter personality, Hemlockfoot was rather fond of him.

Firedapple and Crowshade both supported Hemlockfoot between them and slowly made their way back to camp. Hemlockfoot didn't see a need to be getting help, as he could walk decently on his own, but he didn't bother arguing. He was too nervous about Morningdaisy and what she had to say to him to argue with anyone.

"Why'd you even run into the lake?" Crowshade asked coldly. "Didn't you hear us?"

Hemlockfoot sighed. "Not important. Just get me back to camp."

Firedapple frowned. "Why were you asking me if you were sick?"

"Just get me back to Rainpaw..." he trailed off.

The rest of the walk was cold and silent. The medicine cat could feel Crowshade's annoyance hanging in the air around him. He was thankful that the tom's sister had become deputy and not him. Owltuft was far nicer and understanding than her littermate. She'd make a good leader one day.

Rainpaw was waiting for Hemlockfoot when the cats arrived. He brought Firedapple to the den as well, telling her she needed to be dealt with before she caught a cold. Hemlockfoot collapsed in his nest, trying his best to drown out the worried voice of his apprentice.

"What were you thinking?" he asked as he sent away Firedapple, turning to Hemlockfoot.

The tom looked up at the blue-gray apprentice. He felt sick. How would he explain why he'd done what he did? Surely Morningdaisy scolding him wasn't something he should tell the apprentice, especially since it would mean revealing what he did.

"I'm sorry..." Hemlockfoot meowed. "I wasn't thinking."

He felt like Rainpaw was his mentor as the tom continued rambling. "What if you'd have died? What if Firedapple and her patrol hadn't been there in time? We can't be losing anymore cats when we already have this epidemic going around! I can't lose you too!"

Hemlockfoot looked away, his pelt burning with shame. The apprentice had a point. Part of him wished he'd have drowned though. It would mean he wouldn't have to feel so guilty and it would mean the world was safe from him.

"I'm sorry," he said once again, rolling over to face the wall of the den. "Maybe I have bloodcough."

Rainpaw began to lick at his pelt, rubbing it the wrong way to try and bring back some warmth. "Do you?"

Hemlockfoot sighed. "I don't know. I feel sick and confused. I feel like I can't eat but at the same time I could swallow a badger whole."

The blue-gray tom swatted at his mentor's ear playfully. "Until you're choking on your own blood, I don't think you have it."

The tom wanted to tell him there was more to it, that it had more signs than just dying, but he didn't dare raise anymore of a fuss. He

just wanted to rest and maybe even dream of Morningdaisy so he could speak with her once more.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

[image]

The intense pain in his chest was all Hemlockfoot could feel. His entire body felt numb except for the warm sensation of something creeping up his throat. The tom looked down to find blood dripping from his mouth down his throat and chest. Another cough erupted from his lungs, and before he knew it, the tom was on the ground coughing up blood. Chunks of fur and petals up with it. Morningdaisy's fur. Morningdaisy's pansies. The only thing that Hemlockfoot knew didn't belong to her was the blood that he could feel leaking up from his lungs.

He awoke with a start that morning, gasping for air as if he'd emerged from the lake once again. The only thing he could think about was the blood and Morningdaisy. He glanced over at Rainpaw, content to see the younger tom was still asleep. He just wished that camp could stay this peaceful.

The silver-and-white tabby tom got up from his nest and stretched. Peeking out from the den, he could see nobody else was really awake yet. Scorchmask, who was the usual guard for the night, had been replaced with Leopardjump. It was odd not seeing the she-cat sitting in her usual place. Hemlockfoot understood why she needed this break though. After all, it had been StarClan that ripped away her beloved kit.

"Good morning, Leopardjump," Hemlockfoot purred as he approached the tom.

Leopardjump rolled his eyes. "It's so boring at night. I never know what to do."

"Could always just watch everyone else sleep," the medicine cat joked. "Or maybe explore the camp a bit more."

"Ah, yes, wonderful idea! Why didn't *I* think of that?" the warrior

snapped.

Hemlockfoot flinched. He didn't know why he bothered to talk to the tom. Perhaps if he hadn't been born when he was, Crowshade wouldn't have mentored him into being a shorter replica of him.

"I'm just gonna go look for herbs. Have fun sitting around," Hemlockfoot mumbled as he marched off.

The truth was, he knew there weren't any herbs. He knew they were all most likely dead, excluding the few that he and Rainpaw already had enough of.

"Morningdaisy?" he asked, noticing a small little glow coming from up nearby tree.

The starry she-cat leaped down in front of him, starling the medicine cat. Tiny little flecks of light seemed to float around her, and Hemlockfoot could see the snow behind her body.

"You need to stop," she warned him, circling around him like a hungry fish. "You're going to get yourself killed."

"Are you... Mad at me?" Hemlockfoot asked her.

Morningdaisy looked away. "My feelings aren't important right now. What's done is done. You need to go back to camp and stop what you're doing. It will only end badly."

"How am I being bad? I'm trying to *survive*! Clearly I'm doing better than you ever did!" he snapped.

The StarClan warrior narrowed her eyes. "I am above you now. Listen to me, Hemlockfoot. Your downfall will be so easy to avoid if you'd just stop what you're doing."

Hemlockfoot let out a loud, fake laugh. "Stop what I'm doing? I'm keeping myself from starving!"

Morningdaisy ran her paw over the ground. A small vision began under it, showing ShadowClan camp. Hemlockfoot looked into it. Slowly, the view seemed to spiral down to show a gray cat

coughing up its own blood.

The medicine cat froze. "Is that..."

Morningdaisy nodded. "Get back to camp. She can't be saved, but Rainpaw doesn't need to see anyone else die like me."

The tom let out a sigh. He knew what would happen when Petalheart died. He'd just return to camp with the same hunger in his stomach, and if he was unlucky enough to bury the warrior, then he'd end up eating her.

"Why are you sending me back when you know what will happen?" he asked.

The StarClan warrior lashed her tail back and forth. "For once in your miserable life, can you *please* just follow orders!"

Hemlockfoot flinched. He'd never heard the cat talk like this to anyone. He looked away and nodded quickly before turning around and quickly walking off. Before he could say anything more, Morningdaisy had vanished.

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They decorated the body with pine needles and unusable herbs. Hemlockfoot had refused to attend the vigil, warning Molestar that it was better to just get Petalheart's body out of camp as soon as possible. The truth was that he didn't actually care about the others getting ill though. At this point, he just wanted to stop himself.

"Stormbristle and the elders are burying her right now," Rainpaw commented as he entered the den.

Hemlockfoot lifted his head, slowly opening his eyes. "Your father is in a lot of pain right now. I would suggest keeping an eye on him."

Petalheart had been Stormbristle's littermate. The two weren't as close as other cats would be, but they still got along. Hemlockfoot would never understand the pain of losing both a kit and a littermate in such a close timespan, but he knew that the warrior would be more than devastated.

"My father is a strong warrior," the apprentice said bitterly. "He'll be fine. He knows he has to be there for Scorchmask."

Hemlockfoot nodded. "How is she doing?"

"All she does is sleep and cry now. I've tried talking to her but she... she said she doesn't want to talk to anyone right now. Especially someone who works with StarClan."

"Can't blame her. Morningdaisy's death hit all of us like a falling tree branch. It will take time to recover from this."

Hemlockfoot rested his head on his paws again and gently tucked his tail around him. Hunger was gnawing at him. At this point it was almost painful.

Just sleep it off. You can't get yourself into trouble if you're asleep, he thought as he felt himself falling into darkness. *Just sleep it off.*

CHAPTER TWELVE

[image]

It felt like it had been seasons since the tom had last been to the Moonpool. The snow had slowly begun to thaw, leaving the ground mushy and wet. Despite how cold this night was, Hemlockfoot could feel the warmth of new-leaf creeping into his mind. New-leaf meant new beginnings, new growth, and most importantly, it meant he wouldn't starve.

"Who are we waiting on?" Hemlockfoot asked as he arrived.

Wavestorm rolled his eyes. "Leave it to ShadowClan to be late *again*."

"Let's get started," Briardash announced, ignoring the RiverClan tom. "StarClan has to help us."

Ah, yes, StarClan. Will they be angry with me? Will they tell everyone what I did? Hemlockfoot wondered.

"Wait, first, I have something to announce!" Hemlockfoot stammered.

Everyone looked at him. Wavestorm especially didn't seem pleased and looked as if he'd ignore him.

"Rainpaw has been training with me for many moons. I believe it is time he receives his medicine cat name."

Rainpaw's eyes lit up. It had been a while since Hemlockfoot had seen him so joyous.

"I, Hemlockfoot, medicine cat of ShadowClan, call upon upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help he will serve his Clan for many moons. Rainpaw, do you promise to

uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?"

Rainpaw nodded. "I do."

Hemlockfoot thought for a moment. He didn't actually have a plan for the young cat's name. In the distance, he could see Morningdaisy frowning at him with Petalheart beside her.

"Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Rainpaw, from this moment you will be known as Rainwhisper. StarClan honors your truthfulness and compassion, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat of ShadowClan."

Hemlockfoot rested his muzzle on the tom's head. Rainwhisper licked his shoulder in return.

"I'm so proud of you," Hemlockfoot whispered to him.

"I'm glad," Rainwhisper responded just as quietly.

"Rainwhisper! Rainwhisper!" the cats cheered.

Redpaw rushed over to his friend and cuffed him gently over the ear with his paw. Rainwhisper smiled, his pelt seeming to glow with happiness.

Hemlockfoot nodded to Briardash. It was time to face StarClan. The cats settled down slowly, and Rainwhisper looked as if he wouldn't be able to control himself.

The tom rested his nose against the water, a shiver running up his spine at the chill. No matter the weather, it was always this cold. He didn't particularly enjoy it.

"So you did show up," said a voice as Hemlockfoot opened his eyes.

"I had to, Petalheart. As much as I would have liked to, I can't avoid this."

Rowantail stalked over, his eyes seeming to blaze with frustration.

"You shouldn't be here. Get out!"

Hemlockfoot flinched, backing away from the WindClan warrior. He knew that everyone would be upset, but this felt a bit too unreal.

"I-I'm sorry!" he gasped as Rowantail got closer.

The tom felt himself falling into darkness. Slowly, the brightness of StarClan seemed to fade away, leaving him surrounded by blackness. He felt himself land harshly on the ground, and he looked up to find the sky seeping with red and gray. This was the Dark Forest.

"Where am I?" he asked, wondering if anyone would actually answer.

Hemlockfoot found himself standing face to face with himself. The Dark Forest tom stalked around him, lashing his tail. Bloody foam fell from his mouth, and his looked as if they would burst from his head. Blood soaked his paws and chest and muzzle. It was a grizzly sight.

"You did this to me!" the tom screeched as he sprang at the real Hemlockfoot.

Before he knew it, pain seared through his stomach. The Dark Forest version of him had begun to eat. He screamed, thrashed, and kicked, but nothing seemed to do anything.

He awoke in a panic, gasping and flailing about. Without checking to see who else was awake, he rushed off to the side and felt his previously eaten mole begin to creep up his throat. He hunched over, vomit seeming to spring forward from inside him.

"Are you... okay?" Redpaw asked, blinking away his sleepiness as he approached.

"Star away from me!" he hissed back.

The WindClan apprentice frowned. "Sorry..."

"Rainwhisper, we have to go back to camp. I don't feel good," Hemlockfoot growled as he quickly stormed past the new medicine cat.

Without another word, they trailed back to camp. Hemlockfoot took the lead, not caring where he stepped or who he alerted. He didn't feel safe anywhere now.

If StarClan truly was planning to send him to the Dark Forest, would there actually be a point in trying to redeem himself? *The least I could do is go down to the Dark Forest being feared. Survival of the fittest is the rule down there.*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

[image]

"Evil."

"Disgusting."

"Insane."

The voices seemed to echo through the forest as the two medicine cats walked. Hemlockfoot knew that Rainwhisper hadn't spoken though. These voices were hardly able to be heard, yet held a crisp sound to them like crunching leaves.

"How could you eat your own Clanmates?"

The tom flattened his ears and lashed his tail as he walked. "Just shut up already!" he spat.

"Hemlockfoot... I didn't say anything," the other tom meowed. "Are you feeling ill? Do I need to get Molestar?"

The medicine cat looked back at Rainwhisper and frowned. "I wasn't talking to you. But you can go on ahead of me if you'd like."

"No, I insist that you come back to camp with me. If something is happening then I need to be there for you. Please."

Hemlockfoot sighed and kept walking. The familiarity of ShadowClan's pine forest was almost comforting. The only thing making it a horrible place to him now was the StarClan cats out to get him. What would happen if they entered into the realm of the living? Would they kill him?

"So what did StarClan tell you?" he dared to ask Rainwhisper.

"I didn't see them at all. I was all alone in the forest territory

looking at an odd flower during new-leaf. I'm wondering if it is a cure for bloodcough... or just a really weird dream."

Hemlockfoot nodded. "Perhaps we should find it when the snow is gone. Was it a familiar plant or was it something we've never seen before?"

"I've never seen it before. It was small though and was scattered in clumps around the base of the pine trees. I can't remember all the details but some were pale orange and some were a dark yellow. Pointy leaves too," he explained.

How lovely. A new plant arrives just in time for me to die. Or maybe it was just a weird dream. There isn't a point in using a plant that you can't identify since it can just kill you though, he thought.

"If you need to talk to me, you know you can," Rainwhisper suddenly said as he walked in front of him.

Hemlockfoot pushed past him and into the camp, ignoring the tom's words. How could he trust anyone? What if StarClan had told everyone? Was Rainwhisper trying to hide the fact he knew what he had done?

"I don't need your help or your pity," he spat as he rushed into the den.

It should have been a great day. Rainwhisper has received his name, there may be a cure, and nobody had died while he was gone. But it wasn't a great day now that StarClan was after him.

"What's wrong with you?" Molestar asked, slipping out of his den. "You're making so much noise while everyone is trying to get some rest."

Hemlockfoot ignored the tom and collapsed in his nest. He could hear whispers echoing around him. He didn't know whether they came from Rainwhisper and Molestar or if they came from the dead. Whether or not it mattered at this point was the real concern.

"Why can't you just be quiet!" he hissed to whoever would hear. "Leave me alone!"

They probably think I'm going crazy.

But you are going crazy.

Am I really?

Yes, you are. You've eaten two cats and now you're hearing voices. It doesn't get crazier than that.

Hemlockfoot tried to ignore the whispers as he argued more with himself in his head. He wanted to believe he was alright, that nothing was wrong, but that couldn't be farther from the truth.

"He's refusing to tell me anything. I think something is wrong. He's never like this."

"Is he sick?"

"I'm... I'm not sure anymore."

Hemlockfoot pushed his face into his paws, trying to regulate his breathing as if he wasn't alarmed. Was he actually sick? Did Rainwhisper know he was sick? *Are they referring to my physical or mental health though? Or is it both?*

"StarClan, if you can hear me... I'm sorry," he began. "I'm sorry for everything. I didn't mean for any of this to happen. I need your guidance."

"Who are you talking to?" Molestar asked, slipping into the shadowy den.

"I'm asking StarClan for guidance. Who are *you* talking to?" Hemlockfoot snapped.

Molestar let out an awkward cough. "We are worried about you, y'know. Is there anything we can do to help you?"

He shook his head. "Just leave me alone."

"StarClan," he said again, even more quietly than the first time. "I'm so scared for your judgement. I didn't... I didn't mean for anything

to happen this much. I don't know what overcame me on those days. But now that I have bloodcough and probably am going crazy, I'm starting to wonder if maybe being dead would be better."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

[image]

Rainwhisper awoke that morning to find the sun shining and snow had melted. Many days had passed since the last meeting at the Moonpool and it was obvious to him that leaf-bare was over.

"It took long enough," he told himself as he looked around the camp. "All the elders said this one was much longer than the others."

Owltuft approached the young tom, Ashclaw and Fennelpaw trailing along behind her. The two didn't seem too thrilled about whatever Owltuft had in mind.

"Is this about them playing on the RiverClan border?" Rainwhisper asked, eyeing the two cats.

"Indeed it is. Glad you remembered. Are you busy at all?" she asked.

Rainwhisper shook his head. "Not that I'm aware. I was going to go look to see if any herbs have grown though."

"*Actually*," Hemlockfoot butted in, "I was going to be working with him today. I have some things I want to teach him."

The blue-gray tom eyed his mentor. It had been such a long time since Hemlockfoot had been this happy and relaxed. Perhaps the new weather was bringing back the happy tom he once knew. It was almost too good to be true.

"What else is there to learn?" Rainwhisper asked him.

"I was thinking of going over poisonous things. Also I wanted to show you how to sneak around Twolegplace to get some herbs."

"Good!" Owltuft laughed. "Fennelpaw and Ashclaw could tag along.

Maybe it'll teach them where they really belong."

Fennelpaw let out a loud groan. "I didn't realize that they own the entire stream! I should be allowed to play in the water! It's so hot outside now!"

"And not once did you consider what would happen if RiverClan came over? Did you forget what they did to your Clanmates?"

"It's been moons since that incident," Ashclaw pointed out. "Plus, nothing bad happened, so there shouldn't be an issue."

"You're going with the medicine cats. Make sure to help them carry whatever they need to bring back," Owltuft ordered before marching off.

"Talk about annoying," Ashclaw grumbled, turning to the medicine cats.

Rainwhisper sighed. "She's just looking out for you two. We can't be antagonizing RiverClan more by scaring off all their fish."

Hemlockfoot nodded. "Alright, can we go now? I have so much to share."

• • • •

"This is usually where I see deathberries growing. I also know that as we get closer to Twolegplace, there will probably be more poison hemlock. Avoid it at all costs, Rainwhisper."

Rainwhisper nodded. It seemed ironic to him that a medicine cat, someone who is supposed to heal, would be named after such a lethal plant.

"What happens if you eat it?" Fennelpaw asked, clearly interested.

"It kills fast. Usually results in seizures, paralysis, drooling, and other things. I've never witnessed anyone die from it but I have heard rumors of ThunderClan cats accidentally eating it many moons ago. Not sure if they survived or not."

"Cool!"

Ashclaw cuffed his apprentice over the ear. "That isn't cool! That's terrible!"

Fennelpaw rolled her eyes. "Whatever you say, elder."

Rainwhisper let out a small laugh as Ashclaw grumbled to himself. Hemlockfoot didn't seem very interested in their conversation though. Instead, his eyes seemed to be fixed on the path ahead of them.

"Is something wrong?" Rainwhisper asked him quietly.

Hemlockfoot shook his head. "Nothing is wrong. Just thinking about the future. You're going to be an amazing medicine cat one day."

"Of course I am! I have you as a mentor," he laughed.

The older tom smiled faintly but it quickly vanished as they reached the stretch of land between the forest and Twolegplace.

Long stems of hemlock seemed to reach into the sky, with their white flowers beginning to bloom. The stems, with streaks of purple on them, looked tempting to chew. *That's a terrible thought though. I'm not sure Hemlockfoot would even be able to help me in time if I ever ingested some. He's too happy now to be dealing with any of that.*

"The thunderpath is up ahead. Keep watch and stay close. Whatever you do, do *not* stop running when we cross," Ashclaw warned his apprentice.

Fennelpaw nodded. "Has anyone ever been hurt crossing it?"

Hemlockfoot nodded. "It's how we lost my father. He panicked and Molestar didn't get to him in time. Accidents happen and we need to prevent them to the best of our abilities."

"It looks clear," Rainwhisper announced.

"Run!" Ashclaw yowled before pelting across, Fennelpaw close behind. Hemlockfoot and Rainwhisper followed quickly, careful not

to trip.

As they reached the first twoleg nest, Hemlockfoot turned to them. "I want you two warriors to watch out for any danger. Tell us if you see anything concerning nearby. Rainwhisper, follow me."

The two medicine cats leapt onto the wooden fence, looking around and below for signs of dogs or other cats. A fluffy white cat was resting in the twoleg nest nearby, watching them closely through narrowed eyes.

"You seem out of character," Rainwhisper said.

"What do you mean?"

"You seem so happy. Relaxed. Is something wrong?"

Hemlockfoot shook his head. "I feel better than ever. Now, catmint usually grows here, so you're going to want to come here more than other places when searching for it. The twoleg doesn't seem to mind me, I remember one time it scratched my ears and seemed to enjoy my company."

"So you're just going to be a kittypet now?" he laughed.

"How dare you!" Hemlockfoot replied, pretending to be offended. "I am a skilled medicine cat. I know where my loyalties are!"

The two toms joked back at forth for what felt like moons. Rainwhisper knew it was too good to be true, but what he didn't know was what was awaiting him in the near future.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

[image]

It was, once again, an absolutely gorgeous day. The sun was beginning to shine, the grass was growing, and the birds seemed to be singing louder than ever. It was still early, but most of ShadowClan had awoken for their usual dawn patrols.

The medicine cat sat down beside the younger tom's nest, his eyes shut in deep thought. How could he do this? How could he bring out the words to say anything?

"Rainwhisper," he whispered, trying to gently wake him up. He already knew his answer though.

The other tom grumbled and rolled over, flicking his ear in annoyance. Hemlockfoot let out a small laugh. His solemn attitude quickly returned though as he realized what he was going to do.

"Rainwhisper... I want to apologize to you. I'm not asking for your forgiveness, I already know that I don't deserve it. I've done unspeakable things to cats before. I just want you to know that I'm so glad you were my apprentice and I know that wherever I end up, I will always try to be there for you. I'm so thankful to have had you in my life."

Rainwhisper pressed deeper into his nest. Hemlockfoot remained where he was for a few more heartbeats, treasuring his apprentice's scent. He would miss him so much. He never wanted kits of his own, but he couldn't help but feel that Rainwhisper had sort of been his in a way.

"I must be going now. Whatever you find later, don't beat yourself up over it," he sighed.

The tom got up and left the den. He nodded a short goodbye to

Molestar and Owltuft, who seemed to be busy chatting with a patrol that was waiting to head out. The tom walked slowly, admiring the pine forest around him. The sound of birds chirping and singing echoed around him, reminding him of how much he would miss the forest.

I wonder if the Dark Forest has any birds that sing.

"Probably not," he told himself. "It probably just has the sound of whispers and murky creatures. Nothing beautiful about that."

Morningdaisy watched from from afar, her eyes showing a sadness that she hadn't felt for moons. Hemlockfoot noticed her, stopping in his tracks.

"Good morning," he told her calmly.

"I know what you're up to. Please don't do this," the StarClan warrior warned. "Please."

He shook his head. "I've already made my plans. I've already given my farewells. I've already decided. It's going to be poetic, or at least to me. I'm hoping that you'll be there in my final moments."

Morningdaisy shook her head. "You'll have to walk this path without me. I have someone else to get to right now."

• • • •

Rainwhisper grunted as he felt a paw prodding into his side. What did Hemlockfoot want now? Earlier, he had been mumbling something, but the tom hadn't bothered to listen. He could just tell him later.

"Rainwhisper! Wake up!" scolded a familiar voice.

"M-Morning... daisy?" he asked, slightly alarmed.

"No time for this. I need you to get to Hemlockfoot. Please. He refuses to listen to me. At least be there for him-"

The she-cat has begun to fade away before she could finish

speaking. He blinked away his sleepiness and the tears that had begun to form, getting up. What was happening? Was Hemlockfoot in danger? What had happened while he slept?

The words he'd been told earlier slowly began to form in his head. *Apologize... Unspeakable things... Wherever I end up... Don't beat yourself up...*

"Hemlockfoot? Hemlockfoot!" he yowled, rushing out from his den.

Crowshade looked at him, puzzled. "What's wrong?"

"Get Owltuft to organize a search patrol *now!* We need to find him! I think something bad is going to happen if we don't!" he wailed.

The warrior seemed confused but complied anyways. "Ashclaw! Newtdash! Spidertail! We need to head out now."

Rainwhisper didn't bother to stay long enough to see them assemble and leave. He had a feeling in his gut that told him where to go. The cat's scent trail was still fresh enough to follow easily, so there wasn't a need for him to wait for ShadowClan's food trackers.

"Over here!" said the familiar voice of Morningdaisy.

Rainwhisper followed in her direction. Every now and then, he could hear her up ahead, calling to him faintly.

"Hemlockfoot! Hemlockfoot! Answer me!"

There wasn't any answers. However, he could see the large field ahead of him. The scent trail seemed to be getting stronger.

"Hemlockfoot...? Hemlockfoot, are you alright?" Rainwhisper asked, gasping for air as he caught up to the older tom.

Hemlockfoot didn't answer. He didn't even turn to face his apprentice. Instead, he let out a shaky cry. "I'm sorry."

EPILOGUE

[image]

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I can't even begin to explain anything."

"Please, just talk to me. I'm your friend. You can trust me. I'm not going to hurt you."

Hemlockfoot turned to him, white petals seemed to cling to the fur on his face. Poison hemlock. The very thing he'd warned everyone not to touch earlier.

"What... what happened?" he asked, alarmed.

"Remember when Rowantail went missing? Rainwhisper... Rainwhisper, I ate him. I killed and ate him. But I didn't stop there. After Morningdaisy's vigil, I took her body away and I ate it too. I-I-I was so hungry, I didn't realize what I did, and now I have bloodcough and I'm going to die!"

Rainwhisper felt disgusted. He looked at his mentor, not knowing how to respond to anything. This tom, the cat he had grown so close to, had committed unspeakable acts. And now, he had eaten poison hemlock.

Hemlockfoot collapsed, his blue eyes staring off into the distance. Drool seeped from his mouth.

"You're such a mousebrain!" Rainwhisper cried, collapsing and pressing his face into his mentor's pelt. "You absolute mousebrain!"

"Stay away before I infect you," he choked out.

"Shut up! You never had bloodcough! You didn't have anything to worry about! Why couldn't you listen to me? Why didn't you just talk to me?"

Hemlockfoot sighed. "I couldn't bring myself to do it. I'm so sorry."

Rainwhisper choked out a sob. "No, I'm sorry! I should have noticed this! I should have paid attention yesterday! I should have been there for you! I'm so, so sorry!"

The dying cat smiled. "If... StarClan allows me to... I will see you at the Moonpool... Goodbye, Rainwhisper..."

A few heartbeats passed before Hemlockfoot let out a final, raspy exhale. Rainwhisper buried his face into the tom's pelt, his cries muffled.

"Rainwhisper?"

He didn't turn to face Newtdash. The she-cat didn't need to see him like this. "He's gone, Newtdash. He's gone."

"What happened?" she asked, rushing over.

Crowshade and Ashclaw rushed over, Spidertail trailing behind them.

"He did this to himself. He felt there wasn't any hope for him, so he poisoned himself," the tom told them.

Newtdash rested her tail on Rainwhisper's back. "This isn't your fault."

Rainwhisper buried his face into the she-cat's pelt. "Get him away from me. I can't be near him right now. Just take him away."

Crowshade and Ashclaw looked at one another before picking up the now deceased medicine cat. The two toms had never been close with him, but knowing that he'd been suffering this entire time had changed everything.

Newtdash began to lick Rainwhisper's ears comfortingly. "It's going to be alright. Crowshade and Ashclaw are taking him back to camp."

Spidertail sat down. "He was always there for me when I needed help. I wish I could've been there for him. Rainwhisper, if there's anything I can do to help, just say so."

Rainwhisper let out a shaky sob as he pressed his face deeper into the tortoiseshell's pelt. "I just want to see him happy again like he was yesterday! I didn't think this was why he was so happy! I should've known!"

The she-cat nodded. "It wasn't just you. Nobody noticed or thought this was the case. Why don't we get you back to camp so you can rest?"

And with that, the cats returned to camp. The vigil that night was quiet up until Rainwhisper informed them of what had truly been happening. Nobody wanted to believe it, so it was not brought up publicly again. After all, what happens in ShadowClan stays in ShadowClan.

TRIVIA

[image]

I decided a fun thing would be to include some facts about characters in this book! If you have any suggestions or headcanons, feel free to comment those too. So without further ado, here are some things I figured I'd include about my characters.

HEMLOCKFOOT
— He is aromantic asexual.
— He decided not to become a warrior because he felt his name wasn't very "warrior-like."
— He very much enjoys poetry, and although it was glossed over, he wanted his death to be symbolic and poetic of him.
— He views Rainwhisper as a son and his closest friend.
— He does have some anxiety even though it isn't mentioned much, but it can be seen in how he is so caught up and worried about bloodcough and how he starts to go a bit crazy thinking he has it.
— He was originally going to just be a brown tabby with white paws and a white underbelly, but the design changed when I made the cover.
— Another possible name idea was "Turkeywing" but I decided against it after talking to a friend.
— He is approximately 109 moons at his death.

RAINWHISPER
— He is bisexual however he isn't interested in romance and feels it would be unprofessional to even consider it.
— Hemlockfoot's death was rather traumatic for him and has made it difficult for him to deal with cases of poisoning, water hemlock, and plants that look like water hemlock.
— Despite not being too open about his feelings, I tried to show he cared a lot about his mentor and that he suspected something may have been concerning him.
— After Hemlockfoot's death he cut off those he cared about and

focused more on his duty than having friends.
— He and Redpaw were good friends before Hemlockfoot's death.
— Even after learning that Hemlockfoot had eaten his sister, he still cared a lot for him and is still in some denial about it.

WAVESTORM
— He is extremely gorgeous and has very soft fur.
— His general personality to his clanmates is flirty, goofy, and a bit sharp tongued.
— After learning of Hemlockfoot's death, he questioned himself about if it was his fault.
— He hates ShadowClan because his father was killed in a battle with them when he was first born.
— He has two sisters and both of them look almost identical to him.

MOLESTAR
— He is pansexual.
— He is also a transman.
— He is terrified of bees and similar flying insects.
— He has 4 lives left at the start of the book.
— Molestar really hates Cottonstar but always tries to be polite. He believes Cottonstar is too old, uncaring, and unfit to be a leader.
— His second choice for a deputy would most likely be Stormbristle.

SCORCHMASK
— After the death of Morningdaisy, she lost faith in StarClan and bashes them whenever she can.
— Morningdaisy's death has changed her from being calm and collective to being easy frustrated, distant, and easily upset.
— She 100% hates Hemlockfoot and at his vigil she announced she will kill him again once she dies.
— She never had kits again despite originally wanting more than just Rainwhisper and Morningdaisy.

MORNINGDAISY
— She is a bit torn on Hemlockfoot's actions.
— Daisies symbolize innocence, purity, love, and new beginnings which is why she received that suffix.
— She is a lesbian.

FINAL QUESTIONS

[image]

I always enjoy leaving an open plot for my readers in any story I write. It's why I didn't want to write about a couple things in here. Feel free to comment your answers to the questions listed below or anything extra you'd like to say about the story.

1. What sort of afterlife do you think Hemlockfoot received? StarClan or the Dark Forest? Why?

2. Do you think ShadowClan should forgive Hemlockfoot for his actions?

3. Do you have any headcanons for certain characters? If so, which characters and what are they?

4. Do you have any feedback on the story? Please be nice about any criticism you may have.